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ABSTRACT

Following a discussion of a number of objective methods of program evaluation, the author recommends a more subjective or existential model. Described briefly are the behavioral objectives model, the goal-free model, the systems analysis model, the decision-making model, the accreditation and adversary models, and the transactional model. The author advocates transcending the classical scientific world view that is the basis for all these models to a more modern relativistic view. She suggests that programs should not be merely evaluated objectively by outsiders but should be "appreciated" from the point of view of participants. To accomplish such an evaluation she suggests first making as complete a record of the program on videotape as possible. The evaluator then is to play back the videotape to participants and ask them questions concerning their feelings about the program at certain moments. It is maintained that such a method of evaluation will help to explain why the program produced certain outcomes. Finally, the author contends that it is in this understanding of the existential experience of both teachers and learners that the improvement of the teaching and learning process lies. (Author/JM)

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A Professional Publication for Educational Administrators

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

Published bi-monthly, February to December

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Evaluating all aspects of the educational enterprise is a topical and lively issue at the moment. This paper discusses a range of techniques that seek "objective" knowledge about educational programs. What these approaches fail to address is the meaning of evaluation to the participants. Dr. Sungaila discusses an alternative she labels an "appreciative" model. (Ed.)

A NEW MODEL FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION: THE "APPRECIATIVE" ONE!

Helen Sungaila

INTRODUCTION

Australian schools have had the freedom for some time – albeit to various degrees – to define which objectives their staff and students will pursue, design a curriculum to achieve these objectives, and to choose the teaching-learning strategies which, in their view, will best serve their purposes. But with these new freedoms has come the responsibility for schools to ensure that the teaching-learning strategies they have adopted are actually effective in helping students achieve the objectives that the school has set. In other words, schools must now evaluate their educational programs, not simply to justify what they are doing, but to improve teaching and learning. Hence school administrators are often heard to express the desire for a practical formulation of the evaluation process – a school or program *evaluation model* – which they can readily take up and apply.

SOME EVALUATION MODELS

The Behavioural Objectives Model: A range of such models is available. There is, for example, the behavioural objectives model (Popham, 1975) with which most school administrators are already quite familiar, though hitherto bodies outside the school might have determined the learning objectives and assessed their attainment. It is a model concerned with the extent to which students have acquired skills, memorized facts, formulated concepts, understood relationships, acquired principles and laws which the program is attempting to implement.

Ideally this model involves the measurement of performance, in respect of precisely defined learning objectives, both before and after the learning experience takes place. Such performance measures may involve either standardized or tailor-made "paper-and-pencil" tests, or "situational tests", involving, for example, the operation of a machine, interviewing, speaking, listening, reading, writing or role playing. The assessment of performance in either case can be made on the basis of the teacher's observations alone, or on the reports and self-ratings of the students. Paper-and-pencil tests have traditionally been the focus of most program evaluation efforts, with effectiveness being contingent, in the first place, upon the extent to which the tests have reflected the objectives of the course. This has required that the objectives of the course be clearly stated at the stage of course design. Course objectives, however, are not easy to write.

The following rules for specifying course objectives may be helpful. The use of a "strong" or action-oriented verb which describes a specific observable behaviour the program is seeking as an outcome, is desirable. For example, such verbs as "to understand", "to promote", "to enhance", "to encourage" are weak, non-specific verbs. On the other hand, such verbs as "to locate and label", "to classify correctly", "to solve successfully", leave little doubt as to the kind of activity desired.

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Further, only one purpose or aim and one single end-product for each activity should be stated. For example, one of the objectives of a course dealing with the geography of a particular region might be to enable students "to locate and label the rivers in that region"; or "to classify correctly the land forms"; or "to solve successfully, from an inspection of contours, the direction in which part of a river's course would continue". Finally, it is useful to specify the time of expected achievement of all the objectives, to specify a target date by which the learning should have taken place, or if some doubt exists with respect to a range of students, a set of target dates may be specified (Rossi, 1979).

In view of the problems associated with testing – choice of questions, appropriately dealing with marks and scores, distribution and measures of central tendency, variability, calculation of standard deviations, standard errors of measurement, item analysis, reliability and validity, the presentation of results in percentile ranks or standard scores, the problem and process of moderation, and so on – (Scriven, 1972) it may seem more encouraging to consider other evaluation models currently available to the school administrator.

The "Goal-Free" Model: Contentious though the subject of evaluation based on the behavioural objectives model has been, the controversy about evaluation has now been compounded by the recognition that the evaluation process should embrace more than just the intended outcomes of an educational program. If the school administrator concurs with this point of view, then he can adopt what is known as "the goal-free" approach. This evaluation model precludes the evaluator being informed about the objectives or goals of the program and encourages him to search for *all* the effects of the program. That is, not only to investigate student knowledge and attitude outcomes, but also the impact of the program on the teacher(s) involved, on the teacher's colleagues, on other students, on administrators, on parents, on the school or college, on the taxpayer and so on (Scriven, 1973). Although this evaluation model includes a broader qualitative assessment of a program's merit, it is still addressed to program objectives. It takes the stance that even if all the program's objectives are met, the social utility of these objectives must still be assessed.

The "Systems Analysis" Model: Another possibility known as "systems analysis" borrows its conceptual framework from systems theory (Rivlen, 1971; Bertalanffy, 1968) and hence views the school as a complex social system with interacting subsystems. Typically the components of this system are regarded as being of four types: input, processing, control and output. The concern in this approach to school evaluation is to ensure that the *inputs* or resources invested in an educational program, such as administrative and professional time and expertise, facilities, materials and equipment are optimized in terms of *effects* which can be stated quantitatively.

For example, a cost-effectiveness analysis of an educational program might be undertaken. In this case all the resources (goods and services) that go into setting up an educational program would first be considered. The major categories are usually personnel, facilities, materials and equipment. These can be ascertained by carefully examining a program's budgets, accounts and other records. The value of student inputs such as tuition fees, personal supplies, books and transportation costs ought also to be included, as well as the value of the student's time as measured by learning opportunities foregone because of a participation in the program. These program inputs or resources are costed and the effectiveness of the program in reaching given objectives (usually measured by means of standard achievement tests) is related to the monetary value of the program inputs.

The major aim in applying such an evaluation model, is to guide the school administrator in making decisions about the *efficiency* of the program. Is the program producing sufficient educational benefits for the costs incurred? Is the program producing a particular benefit, more or less expensively per unit of program outcome, than other programs designed to achieve the same objective?

The "Decision-Making" Model: The school administrator might also want to know about the *effectiveness* of the educational program in question. In this instance, he could use a "decision making model" of evaluation. The first step in the application of this model is to identify the major levels of decision making to be served by the evaluation (local, regional, state or national). The next step is to identify who makes decisions at each level, for what purpose (research, development, diffusion or adoption), how critical the decisions are, the date by which the information is to be provided, and the alternatives that might be considered. The information requirements are then defined, the information collected, organized, analyzed, and reported. Finally, the administration of the evaluation is scheduled, staff and resource requirements detailed and the budget for the evaluation program worked out. Usually this sort of evaluation proceeds by way of surveys, questionnaires and interviews (Stufflebeam, 1968). It should be noted that this approach also focusses on the attainment of program objectives.

The "Accreditation" and "Adversary" Models: The administrator can also employ the "accreditation model" and seek a rating for the educational program in question from a panel of outside professionals visiting on-site. Or he can adopt the "adversary model" (Wolf, 1968) developing arguments for or against the program on the basis of the judgments of those directly or indirectly concerned with it.

The "Transactional" Model: As another alternative the administrator can consider the educational "process" itself, and focus the evaluation on the numerous transactions between students and students, students and teachers, students and their parents. In other words, the focal point is the transactions among all those involved in the educational process which the program represents. In applying this model the school administrator can prepare a record of what the educators intended by the program, what observers have perceived, what parents and funding bodies generally have expected from it, along with what he considers to be the immediate value of the program. The standards and procedures for making such judgments about the program must be clearly spelled out.

IN THE NAME OF "OBJECTIVITY?"

All of the models discussed above are based on the view that *objective* knowledge about the program can be obtained. It is taken-for-granted that only

objective knowledge about the program can provide some certainty about its value, and that rational decisions about the development, implementation, maintenance or discontinuance of educational programs, ought to be based on such certainties. That such objective knowledge should be sought is not surprising, when it is noted that the laboratory has long been regarded as the most suitable place to conduct evaluative investigations.

Data about an educational program, however, cannot often be derived on an experimental basis. At the least, the administrator/evaluator should endeavour to adopt the role of "objective" observer; to distinguish clearly between "facts" and "values"; to fashion and sharpen his evaluation tools (or "tests") and to clarify what he observes for other observers like himself. In short the objects of his evaluation, whether they be students, teachers, administrators or parents, are regarded in a fundamental sense as things – natural phenomena which have to be explained through controlled observation. Such experimental or quasi-experimental, (empirical) observations are regarded as being the only reliable basis for rational decisions about the merits of the programs.

In other words, all of the evaluation models mentioned above, which are currently available to the practising administrator, are founded in the logical-empirical research tradition, and are designed to allow him to conduct and evaluate the educational affairs for which he or she is responsible in a rational fashion.

Against this background it is extremely difficult to argue for the "respectability" of any other approach to the evaluation of educational programs. Educational, and indeed social science research, is still solidly anchored in the logical-empirical philosophy which underpinned nineteenth century natural science research!

But times are changing. It might be pointed out that modern physics has already challenged the nineteenth century classical "scientific" ideal of knowledge based in an objective description of social or physical phenomena, which current evaluation research pursues. For example, such an ideal of knowledge makes no sense in the world of subatomic physics. This world is now seen to be as inseparable from the physicist, as he, as observer, is from it. Gone is the partition between the observer and the observed, which has been the focus of philosophical debate for centuries. Gone too is the notion of causality! Time sequences, in the world of astro-physics, are recognized as depending on the observer. Time is relative and so, by implication, is space. "In space-time, everything which for each of us, constitutes the past, the present, and the future is given *en bloc*. . . " (De Broglie, 1949).

Likewise, modern literature and modern art bear testimony to a convergence of ideas which clearly stamps as "outdated" the straining after objectivity, the focus on causality, the quest for absolute truth, which natural science, (in particular physics) has long since abandoned. To put it another way, man has come to be perceived in this century less as mind, after Descartes' famous declaration: "Cogito ergo sum – I think, therefore I am", and more as Being – a Being-in-the-world: "I am, therefore I think" (Macquarrie, 1972).

THE "APPRECIATIVE" MODEL OF EVALUATION

The import of this revolution in modern science, art and literature for educational evaluation is considerable. In choosing an evaluation model the administrator can cling to one which reflects a classical, mechanistic scientific world view, or he can move outside the framework of nineteenth century natural science into the intellectual milieu, both scientific and aesthetic, of the twentieth century.

What this means, in practical terms, is that he can seek in his evaluation, first and foremost, an understanding of how participants in the program experience the program. That is to say, an understanding of what it is like to be there undergoing that particular learning experience. *He would, in short, seek not to evaluate, but to "appreciate" the program from the point of view of program participants.* Most evaluation consultants would probably endorse this view, but almost certainly not for the same reason! Nor is any guidance currently given in the literature as to how such an *existential understanding* of the program, as experienced by the participants, might be achieved.

Here is one way!

First the evaluator might make as complete a record of the program as possible on video tape. (It is sometimes argued that such recordings will be unnecessarily intrusive, changing the program experiences in often unpredictable ways, but, in my experience, after only two hours of video recording, program participants become oblivious to the presence of the camera)! It may be unrealistic, in terms of the amount of film required, to record the entire program in which case the evaluator can record, at appropriate time intervals, "moments" of "life in the program" (Frierie, 1972).

Then, either during or after the program, depending on whether it is a formative or summative evaluation which the evaluator is seeking to make, the evaluator can play back these program "moments" to participants, and question them, with respect to each "moment" along the following lines:

- *At that "moment", did you feel anything was missing from the program?*
- *Did you feel there was anything getting in the way of the development of the program?*
- *Did you feel that there was anything available to program participants of which use might have been made, but was not?*
- *What was it like to be there with the other program participants?*
- *What was your "state of mind" – anxiety, curiosity, boredom, alienation, stress, excitement, etc., etc.?*
- *At that "moment" what was your understanding of where the program was going?*

In this way the evaluator does not "code" the program reality in terms of any predetermined classificatory scheme. Rather, he allows the program participants to "decode" for him what the living reality of the program was for them.

Furthermore, if in the discussion of these program "moments", it were also practicable to involve the representatives of funding bodies, program developers, administrators and program practitioners, the necessity for tedious report writing would be obviated, and all concerned could gain a more intimate

understanding of the program. Failing this, the evaluation report might consist of a video taped recording of the participant's discussion of program moments.

But what if program participants are not articulate enough to respond directly to the sorts of questions posed above? This can be overcome if the evaluator has sufficient skill in interviewing techniques to identify a talking point and enter into dialogue with program participants after the manner of an unstructured interview. Such dialogue, in my experience, will generate the substance of the answers to the questions asked above, even though such questions are not posed directly.

In addition, the educational program "moments" recorded will also have generated some dialogue, which can be content analysed along the lines suggested above. Moreover, because of the visual record of participant's experience which a video record provides, the "states of mind" of participants can be gleaned through a study of the participant's body language. For example, a state of mind of interest or boredom can be readily detected by examining participant's facial expressions, (alert or dead-pan staring), the position of their shoulders, (erect or slumped), and so on. In fact, I have found an analysis based in the study of kinesics can be used quite successfully as an index of the states of mind of quite young children experiencing an educational program.

CONCLUSION

Practising school administrators now have the responsibility for evaluating educational programs. There are numerous approaches they can adopt to this task, most of which have been briefly reviewed above. The major point of this paper is that, currently, the model fundamental to all those above has yet to be endorsed by the evaluation researcher and practitioner alike – namely the *"appreciative"* model of evaluation by means of which those responsible for the educational program seek to understand what it is/was like to-be-there-in-that-program-world. If this model is applied *first* then it seems all those concerned about the program – students, teachers, parents, administrators, funding bodies and so on – will not only know eventually if the program was productive, efficient, effective, socially useful or professionally acceptable, (the answers to which are sought by the other models reviewed above). Much more important, they may begin to understand *why* the program outcomes were what they found them to be. It is contended that it is in this understanding of the *existential* experience of both teachers and learners that the improvement of the teaching-learning process lies. It has been assumed in this paper, that this should be the fundamental goal of any practising administrator who adopts and applies an evaluation model.

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